

BY EDWARD KAYIWA

In 2018, hardware dealer Sam Masumba discovered a relic that would later change the trajectory of his business, growing it 70-fold in a space of only two years.

He had discovered a route, through Port Bell via Lake Victoria to Mwanza in Tanzania, to deliver his merchandise cheaply to the northern Tanzania towns, where demand is ever rising.

Previously, Masumba used both road and private ships to transport his cargo, but was often let down by high costs, regular delays and losses, and, in some instances, damage to his merchandise.

Currently he said, the business has grown from exporting only 9,000 tonnes of roofing sheets to approximately 24,000 tonnes, albeit cheaply, safely and timely.

"This has been a turning point in our business. Costs have gone down, cargo is safe, we are exporting more, and we can only look to further expansion of the business," he said.

The spark in Masumba's business was ignited by Government decision to re-open water transport on Lake Victoria, which had taken decades of slumber, following an accident in which two cargo ships collided on Lake Victoria.

On May 8, 2005, MV Kabalega collided with MV Kaawa near Kuye Island, 51 nautical miles from Port Bell and 15 miles from Bukasa Islands, leaving the latter extensively damaged and sunk underwater to date.

Prior to the accident and collapse of the East African Community in 1977, water transport fell under the docket of the EAC Railways and Harbours Corporation (EARHC).

This operated sailing operations between Kisumu in Kenya, Mwanza in Tanzania and Port Bell in Uganda, using rail ferries that carried loaded rail wagons from tracks on the three ports.

REVAMPING WATER TRANSPORT

In its 2016-2021 election manifesto, the government committed to revitalise infrastructure and facilities under the water transport sector by working on existing lake ports, building a new port at Bukasa and deploying more vessels on Lake Victoria.

The Government also promised to enforce the Multinational Lake Victoria Maritime Communications and Transport system, aimed at improving safety on Lake Victoria.

The project is being implemented enforced, and already a Maritime Safety Coordination Centre and Search and Rescue centres have been established.

According to works minister, Gen. Edward Katumba Wamala, the Government also plans to strengthen the maritime



Lake Albert 1 Ferry commissioned which plies the Wanseeke, Pakwach and Nebbi routes has a capacity of 250 passengers and 15 mini-trucks

Govt ramps up water



A train from Dar-es-Salaam will be arriving at Mwanza with cargo and all the storage wagons will be shipped as a consignment to Port Bell and off loaded directly onto another train to Kampala," said works minister, Gen. Edward Katumba Wamala

Uganda's fuel consumption/imports

Fuel imports currently stand at **7.5m liters** every month



The average daily consumption of all fuel products stands at **4.2m litres**

92% imported via the Kenyan, Mombasa



8% come in through Dar es Salaam, Tanzanian

176 fuel tankers ply the highways every month



Kenya's MV Uhuru and Uganda's MV Kaawa can transport **2.64million liters** of fuel from Kisumu to Port Bell every week (**10.56m liters** a month)

PORT BELL

After ten years of idleness, the central corridor trade route through Lake Victoria finally breathed life in 2018, solidifying trade relations between Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania.

According to Gen. Katumba, the re-opening of the trade route signifies government's commitment to have an alternative route to the sea, to keep the movement of people and goods flowing across the region.

Katumba said Uganda's MV

Kaawa and Tanzania's MV Umoja have been improved to provide quick and reliable marine transportation services between Port Bell and Mwanza.

He said the two ships have capacity to carry up to 800 metric tonnes each, making them a viable alternative for carrying bulk cargo from Tanzania to Uganda and vice versa.

"A train from Dar-es-Salaam will be arriving at Mwanza with cargo and all the storage wagons will be shipped as a consignment to Port Bell and off loaded onto another train to Kampala," he said.

Katumba said the route would also help to protect the country's roads, which are easily destroyed by bulk cargo, hence saving on road repairs and reconstruction costs.

He said re-opening the central corridor is helping Uganda increase her efficiency in trade and economic development and also create competition with the northern route through Kenya, which is good for trade.

The Central Corridor connects the Port of Dar-es-Salaam by road, rail and inland waterways to Kenya, Uganda, and Rwanda,

administration department at the ministry of works for regulatory compliance, enforce standards for safety, security, pollution prevention and skilling of the human resource.

A 2012 report by the Lake Victoria Basin Commission (LVBC) showed that accidents on the lake were mostly caused by unstable boats, bad weather, overloading, lack of safety equipment and poor seamanship including the stubborn weed and the water hyacinth.



MV Sigulu was commissioned in 2019

THE NEW FERRIES

In June 2019, the Uganda National Roads Authority (UNRA) floated MV Sigulu for the first time. The ferry, which is the country's largest so far, connects Namayingo district to Sigulu and Lolwe Islands on Lake Victoria. According to UNRA, it has capacity for 300 people.

Construction of the new Buvuma ferry at Port Bell has been completed. The vessel is expected to navigate between Kiyindi in Buikwe and Buvuma.

The vessel was assembled to replace the old ferry which has been reportedly breaking down often, condemning residents to the use of canoes and cargo boats for transport.

According to UNRA, the new ferry has improved propellers and eco-sounders used in mapping, improved safety measures, a deck to cater for more people and toilets for travellers. The vessel has a capacity for 200 people and 18 small cars. In July 2018, the MV Albert Nile One Ferry at Wanseko Landing site in Bulisa District.

The MV Albert Nile one ferry connects Bulisa district to Nebbi (Panyimur) in Uganda and could also move up to Congo via Lake Albert. The MV Albert Nile 1 ferry carries up to 250 passengers.

transport to boost trade

Burundi and eastern DR Congo.

It forms part of the backbone of the regional transportation system in East and Central Africa, carrying imports and exports of the five countries, with a population of more 120 million people.

Katumba said in the medium term, URC will rehabilitate the MV Pamba ship, improve port facilities and construct the new port at Bukasa.

He said so far, the government has done repairs on the Port Bell warehouse to allow for consolidation of exports and offloading of imports.

PETROLEUM PRODUCTS

Katumba said plans are also underway to re-introduce wagon ferry services between Port Bell and the Kisumu jetty in Kenya to ease transportation of fuel and other petroleum products.

Already, heavy goods trailers, especially fuel tankers, wreck havoc with the flow of traffic on most of Kampala's narrow roads, creating a nightmare that most road users dread to face.

These, he said do not only cause congestion, but have been at the centre of damaging roads, hence increasing the cost of road infrastructure maintenance.

He said two wagon ferries, Kenya's MV Uhuru and Uganda's MV Kaawa, would be consigned to dispatch the fuel, carrying 22 wagons with a capacity of 60,000 litres each, via the lake to Port Bell.

Katumba said, with the two ships, the new route has the propensity to transport 2.64 million litres of fuel from Kisumu to Port Bell every week, translating to about 10.56 million litres a month.

"This also translates to removing more than 176 fuel tankers from the highways every month, which saves on traffic congestion, accidents and breakdown of roads," he said.

Uganda's energy ministry statistics indicate that the country's fuel imports currently stand at approximately 7.5 million



Fuel tankers on the road will reduce once wagon ferry services between Port Bell and Kisumu resume

litres every month. This means that the new system surpasses the current means of transportation.

The average daily consumption of all fuel products stands at 4.2 million litres. About 92% of these products are imported via the Kenyan port of Mombasa, while only 8% come in through the Tanzanian sea port of Dar-es-Salaam.

According to the Uganda Railways Corporation managing director, Charles Kateeba, approximately \$10m has been spent on rehabilitation of the Kampala Port Bell rail line, purchase of locomotives and remanufacturing of five diesel electric locomotives to ply the lake route, making Uganda ready for the new move.

300

MV Sigulu, which connects Namayingo district to Sigulu and Lolwe Islands on Lake Victoria has capacity for 300 people

BUKASA AND JINJA

Katumba said under the ministry's new five-year strategic plan, the Government will build a new port at Bukasa at approximately \$56.5m. Compensation of the project-affected persons is ongoing.

He said detailed engineering design for the New Kampala Port at Bukasa was complete, and construction is expected to begin in the 2020/21 financial year.

The Government, he said, is also in advanced stages of renovating the Jinja pier to facilitate transportation of oil to the reservoirs in Jinja and critical infrastructure materials for the budding industries in the east and northern Uganda.

The Jinja port, which has similar

facilities with Port Bell, has not been in use since 2007. The railway line connecting the port was also vandalised but the general user cargo side is fine and does not need rehabilitation.

URC has, however, secured funds to rehabilitate the railway line by March.

"This will also help to transport materials for the United Nations, especially for its operations in northern and northeastern Uganda," Kateeba said.

He said already, rehabilitation works for the Jinja pier are set to commence in the coming financial year, with repairs of the railway line, the dock, warehouses and other maritime equipment.

Plans for the revival of the sh3b project are in advanced stages to ensure that Mwanza-Jinja port services are resumed this financial year.

He said renovation of the Jinja port area will cost about sh2b, and once complete, the facility will have a repair yard for ships and a training facility for marine personnel.

Water transport in Uganda is part of the National Road Network under the Ministry of Works and Transport. About 241,038 square kilometres of Uganda's total land area is covered by swamps, lakes and rivers, most of which are navigable.

Almost all of Uganda's water resources are trans-boundary in nature and are shared with her neighbours, such as Kenya and Tanzania (Lake Victoria) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Lake Albert and Edward).

Kateeba said there is an overwhelming response from the business community wanting to use the route way beyond what the government had expected in a short period of time.

He said the use of port services is, however, hindered by the fact that some traders still do not find the water route attractive or flexible enough and there are more imports than exports on the Ugandan side, which creates a discrepancy in the size of cargo.